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Red reports: the evolution of a Hungarian newsreel collection

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ABSTRACT

The silent weekly newsreel series *Vörös Riport-Film/Red Report-Film* was published by the leftist revolutionary regime of Hungary's Republic of Councils in 1919. With the distribution of a total of twenty episodes, the medium of cinema emerged as a tool of state propaganda in Hungary for the first time. In this paper, the collection of *Red Reports* is offered as an illustrative case for examining the varied use and interpretation of the very same footage at different institutions over several decades. The analysis posits that the subsequent development of the collection is not only interesting due to the historical significance, but it also demonstrates how easily the status of archival material can change under unstable socio-political circumstances such as those in Eastern Europe. Taking up recent scholarship emphasising the storiedness and broken structure of the archival institutions, I will argue that the present-day understanding of the collection cannot be extricated from prior archival meanings that have strongly shaped the descriptive context and metadata. Consequently, the archival status of the films can be seen as an ongoing process of negotiation, which, in turn, has significant ramifications for how national and regional history has been understood and interpreted over the past century.

KEYWORDS

Newsreel collections; archives in unstable socio-political environment; archives and memory; Hungarian film history and politics; (post) socialism

Introduction

While the scholarship on the interrelationship between archives and memory is well elaborated regarding the Western tradition, less has been published about the issue in terms of the Eastern-European region. Due to the geographical focus of the mainstream research paradigm, the current discourse concentrates on the archives embedded in a rather stable national history, but it is less aware of the working of institutions affected by an ever-changing socio-political environment. The archival life of the material and the way that it shapes the historical sense of the community can be strongly affected by the unstable nature of the holdings as well as the instability of the institutional settings. As Antoinette M. Burton (2005, 6) argues, the archives neither emerge fully formed, nor innocent of the struggles for power in their own creation and their interpretative methods. Because all archives are defined within and by a certain moment, their structure is exposed to prospective historical

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shifts. Whenever the socio-political background changes, the archive must be reorganised or adapted to the new course in order to keep the institutional authority and save its holdings. A fluctuating or quickly changing environment can be considered unstable, which is an external characteristic that fundamentally and periodically influences the status of the archive.

The questions proposed by this paper aim at building theory and filling the gap of the scholarship on archives and memory within a non-stable historical environment. Various aspects of the problem can be investigated through the story of the modern archives of Eastern Europe, where radical historical shifts have occurred relatively often, and these turns have always strongly affected historical narratives. The focus of the present research is on the Hungarian archival field. However, based on some common patterns, the findings can be significant for the better understanding of the archival structure of the region on a wider scale. Since the number of publications about the Hungarian audio-visual archives is relatively small, the text is mainly relevant as a gap-filling contribution on a national level.

The first part of the paper will explore the role of audio-visual archives in the formation of national identity and national narratives. From the concept of narrativity, I will arrive to the problem of the 'broken' or 'unstable' attributes of collections that will be treated with a special emphasis. Coming to a closer examination of the Eastern-European region, I will argue for the use of an 'ethnographical' approach as the critical frame of the research (Lynch 1999, 83). The archival life of the special collection of the *Red Report* newsreel series, now preserved by Nemzeti Filmintézet – Filmarchívum/National Film Institute – Film Archive – Hungary, will serve as a case study for further investigation. Through a short historical introduction to the turbulent archival life of the films, I will demonstrate how easily the status of the material can be changed and the consequences of such changes.

Archives and narratives

The postmodern turn in archival science has challenged the concept of the archive as a neutral and complete source of the historical past. From this point on, the archives have been understood as social constructs that are dependent on the people who establish the institutions and hold the material as well as the intellectual resources to carry them (Schwartz and Cook 2002, 3). In addition, it also became clear that archives not only influence the discourse around the identity of a community, but they themselves are part of the discourse in primary form. As social constructs, the archives maintain the objects of the past and keep strong bonds with the present, and their de-construction and re-construction is therefore often desired during the struggles for power. The contested nature of the archival site opens the floor for contested narratives that are often composed by the destruction, silencing or re-interpretation of the existing records.

As Jacques Derrida famously states, 'there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation' (1995, 11). This power is manifested in many ways, but the most important dimensions are related to the topics of historiography, memory and identity. The formation of a dominant social discourse around these topics is formed through the management of the collection, through the actual tasks of acquiring, selecting, preserving and disseminating the treasures of the vaults. The archivists are not only responsible for the longevity of the

objects, but they are also the most competent people who have the hermeneutic right to provide their interpretation (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995, 10; Jones 2012, 9). As the guardians of the collection they become the depositaries of the knowledge that can be used as power to shape the ongoing discourse of society.

In his article 'Tacit Narratives: The Meaning of Archives' Eric Ketelaar further elaborates on the problem. In his view, the archival record always mirrors the reality as understood by the archivers (Ketelaar 2001, 133). He introduces the concept of 'activation' and draws attention to the fact that every interaction, intervention and interpretation creates new meaning for the material. According to Ketelaar, the archival record is an organic structure without fixed boundaries and explanation, and it thereby works as a membrane 'allowing the infusing and exhaling of the values which are embedded in each and every activation' (2001, 138). Through the activation of the records, the status of the collection can be easily changed, moreover, the aim of the activation is sometimes this desired change itself.

National archives are important sources of the legitimisation of the dominant group of the society (Berger 2013, 2), and this process requires solid statements about the past and present of the community. In Foucault's words, 'the archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events' (2002, 129). In order to keep this system functioning the statements must be phrased and grouped in a logical way, or in other words a certain narrativity must be created. These stories always represent the moment and space where they were born, and undergo alternations, or even disappear, in the course of time. The 'general system of formation and transformation' (Foucault 2002, 130) motivates the dynamics of the archive and produces new narratives that usually replace the former ones. The Foucauldian system of the statements is controlled by the groups within the community that own the resources and the power to maintain the archival institutions. As a result, the most important story of the society is the 'master narrative' told by the dominant group that needs to tell the legend of its own origin and raison d'être. Their main goals with this story are to 'define the identity of the we-community as well as that of its enemies, structure the way in which time is experienced, and justify the social and political reality around which the group is organized' (Thijs 2008, 60).

As Stefan Berger points out, the paradoxical situation is that even though the existence of master narratives is strongly associated with the archives, they are full of mythical elements and are often phrased without exact references to archival sources (2013, 3). As a consequence of this presumed connection, the institutions gain a fetishised status as symbols of power, and often become subjects of destructive and violent forces during shifts of political regimes. Therefore, the history and structure of the archives developed in a relatively stable socio-political atmosphere can strongly differ from the collections in an unstable and turbulent environment. In these regions it is not only the status of certain social groups that is destabilised but also the status of the archives. This leads to a constantly changing identity on at least two main levels. On the one hand, the identity of the institution can be reframed according to the new interests, while on the other hand, the identity of the collection can also be changed. With the analysis of the *Red Report*s, I would like to draw attention to this transformative status that I will address as 'fluid identity'. In my definition, this means that the archival document can be embedded in different environments and different narratives at different times which leads to more than one identity over a longer period of time, which are diverse but transformed from one into the other over time.

Archives in unstable socio-political environment

In the 18th century, the attention of historians turned to archives as authoritative sources, and the dual function of the archive as repository of historical evidence as well as agent of the current records was formulated by the end of the 19th century (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 22). While the establishment of modern archives is closely connected to the formation of the concept of the nation, the understanding of the collections can be heavily fragmented for historical reasons.

Researching the turbulent history of the German archives form the 19th century to the people's personal memories on World War I, the racialised archives of the Third Reich and the displaced archives of the Holocaust survivors, the historian Peter Fritzsche (2005, 204) coins the concept of the 'broken archives'. He argues that the story of archives mirrors multiple stories of the nation, where not only the archive is responsible for producing history but also the history produces its own archives. In this sense, the 'archive was not simply constituted as a powerful way to contain the past but developed in relationship to a past that was regarded as fragmented, distant, and otherwise difficult to hold on to' (Fritzsche 2005, 186). For a better sense of this process, one must realise that the archives rarely develop in an organic way, and the recognition of loss is essential for their understanding. According to Fritzsche (2005, 204), the consequences of this phenomena are twofold. On the one hand, the broken and fragmented characteristics mean a definite challenge to the writers of history, on the other hand this situation provides great opportunity to reflect on the 'storiedness' of history through particular cases. In accordance with the argumentation of Fritzsche, the historian Michael Lynch suggests carrying out more analyses on the micro level to make the bigger picture detailed. He advises to publish archival case studies, in his term 'ethnographies', on historical and contemporary issues describing the 'work of assembling, disrupting and reconfiguring particular archival collections' (Lynch 1999, 83).

According to Lynch, this approach could draw the attention to the archive *in formation* through its presentation as a historical phenomenon rather than a source for historical research. Regarding the history of the Eastern-European audio-visual archival scene, I argue that the ethnographical methodology outlined by Lynch is rational and applicable, because the socio-cultural role of the archives and narratives becomes comprehensive only with consideration of the disruptions, loss and political shifts of the region.

The original idea of film archives was also aimed at strengthening the historical memory. The notion has first emerged as a call for the preservation of the past as early as 1898 (Matuszewski 1995). According to the cinematographer Boleslas Matuszewski, film has to be given 'the same authority, official existence and accessibility as other already well established archives' because it might be a 'privileged source of historical evidence' (1995, 323). The international organisations working in the audio-visual field, such as FIAF (The International Federation of Film Archives), stress the importance of engagement with the agenda of national heritage through membership policies, tenders as well as communication. The existing literature on the histories of national audio-visual archives also mostly concentrates on institutions in stable socio-political environments.[1] Based on their origins, however, the work of the archives aiming at the preservation of national film heritage can't be considered neutral, and moreover sometimes reinforce national identities in conflicting ways (Frick 2011, 19).

Considering the archives' involvement in producing the narratives of the past, I argue that the micro-level reading of the history of the archives is an effective way to understand

the dynamics of working in the unstable, Eastern-European environment. In the next sections I will follow the approach advised by Ann Laura Stoler (2002, 87) regarding the analysis of the colonial archives, considering the archive as 'epistemological experiment', with a focus on the archival process instead of archives as things.

The *Red Report* newsreel series

As we will see in the following case study, the unstable socio-political environment does not only affect the status of the archival institution, but also of the works safeguarded within. Through the research of the archival history of the films, many layers of this impact can be revealed. In this section, I will take a closer look at the archival life of a relatively undamaged, special group of the early motion pictures, currently in the possession of the National Film Institute – Film Archive – Hungary. I chose the series of the *Red Report* newsreels for examination, because this is an important non-fiction sub-collection with long archival life and frequent activisation for the purpose of re-use. These silent newsreel compilations were produced during only a few months in 1919, and they have been used both as historical sources and tools of propaganda from the very beginning. To fully understand the importance of the collection, I will provide a brief introduction to its historical background.

Historical background of the collection

The years 1918–1920 are considered one of the most turbulent periods of the history of Hungary. By the autumn of 1918, it was obvious that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had lost World War I and the disintegration of the empire was inevitable. Following the Aster Revolution between 28 and 31 October, Charles IV recognised the right of Hungary to determine the form of their state. On 16 November, the provisional government proclaimed the Hungarian People's Republic and Mihály Károlyi became the provisional president. Despite the initial euphoria of the democratic transformation, it remained only a short-lived phenomenon in the country.

On 21 March 1919, the leftist forces of the country successfully took the power by coup, following the fusion of the Social Democratic Party and the Party of Communists from Hungary under the name of the Hungarian Socialist Party (Romsics 1999, 121–130). The newly proclaimed Hungarian Soviet Republic, led by the Revolutionary Governing Council, held strong bonds with the Russian Communists. The leader of the new state was the president Sándor Garbai, but real control was held by the foreign minister Béla Kun, who had returned from the Soviet Union not long before. In order to keep the revolutionary stream and suppress the anti-Communist groups, the government established its own secret police, various military and paramilitary forces, such as the fearsome band of the 'Lenin Boys'. The violent wave of the Red Terror in 1919 caused the death of hundreds of people, and enlistments were also common as the Red Army had been continuously attacked by the militias of the neighbouring countries and needed troops. The situation became critical after the unsuccessful Hungarian counter-offensive against the Romanian invasion, and these chaotic circumstances led to the rapid collapse of the system within only a few weeks. The power of the Revolutionary Governing Council lasted for 133 days until it came to an end on 1 August 1919.

Not only did the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic use the means of propaganda extensively, but further the story of these four months became part of different interpretative historical narratives (Bödők 2018, 7–39). The Horthy-era (1920–1944) phrased its own self-definition in strong contrast with both revolutionary systems, the first People's Republic and the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which was the direct predecessor of the regime. The merciless repression and the violent crimes of the red leaders were depicted in vivid ways to emphasise the values of the consolidation and to distract the people form the possible resurrection of the leftist ideas. After World War II, the Communist agenda was gradually restored, especially from 1949, when Mátyás Rákosi and the Hungarian Working People's Party set up the totalitarian Communist dictatorship under the supervision of the Soviet Union. The memory of the 1919 Soviet Republic became a chapter of the glorious past and the persecutors of the interwar period were considered pioneer heroes. During the Kádár-era, the crimson counter-revolution of 1919 was often compared to the events of 1956 that were also marked as counter-revolution by the authorities (Bödők 2018, 18). From the 1970s, the point of view of professional historians became more divided and moved toward objectivity, but the evaluation of the 133 days in 1919 has remained an important part of the collective memory following the fall of the regime in 1989 until the present 100th anniversary of those events in 1919.

Red reports – *the birth of a collection*

The silent film industry of Hungary has been well connected to the global network during the 1910s. Based on the flourishing and highly professional environment of the decade, the new leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic had realised that film is the key medium of modern entertainment and propaganda. Immediately after their seizure of power, the movie industry became the first sector to be nationalised, transforming private companies and assets into public holdings in order to gain full control over the field.[2] The re-organisation plan of the industry, under the supervision of the Central Work Leader Council, aimed at showing clear and effective structure of power. The most important strategic goals were the establishment of modern and accessible motion picture theatres throughout the country, the set-up of portable screening facilities in order to carry the message of films to less developed regions, reaching children and youth audiences, and providing their colleagues with continuous practical and ideological education. On many occasions, the state stepped up as a caretaker for the welfare of film industry workers, as was the case for 41 film actors, including well-known silent film stars like Ilona Mattyasovszky, Ica Lenkeffy, and the rising talent Géza Bolváry, who had been officially hired with monthly salary paid by the state. Artists, such as Mihály Kertész (Michael Curtiz) and Sándor Korda (Alexander Korda), who later pursued international careers, also appeared among the filmmakers and activists.[3] Due to the short life of the regime, most of the visionary plans couldn't be executed, and the overall reform of the sector stayed an ambitious idea rather than a realised project. Unfortunately, almost all the films shot during the time of the Hungarian Soviet Republic have been considered lost today, and we know their titles and subjects only from descriptive archival sources.

Besides the feature films, the non-fiction genre also played a privileged role in the cultural strategy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. In the frame of the strictly controlled and flourishing newsreel production, a total of 20 editions of the weekly series titled *Red Report* were published. Through this remarkable body of work, the 133 days of the regime in 1919 became

an outstandingly documented period of Hungarian history. The creators of the newsreels were experienced filmmakers who implemented the methods of reportage and agitation based on central directives. Béla Paulik, who returned from Russia not long ago, became the Political Commissar responsible for the control of the film industry (Garai 1969, 12). *Vörös Film* (*Red Film*), which was the leading professional newspaper of the time, reveals further connections between the Russian film industry of the time and the Hungarian propaganda organisation. From its articles we learn that Tibor Szamuely, People's Commissar for Military Affairs, personally brought seven films by plane from his visit in Soviet-Russia to be screened in cinemas of Budapest as well as in front cinemas (*Vörös Film*, 7, 14, and 21 June 1919). The newspaper praises the motion pictures for their high technical quality and propagandistic strength, and even calls them the 'Russian *Red Reports*'.[4]

Red Film articulated the mission of the Hungarian newsreels with the following words:

> The Red Report-Film held great promise. It first and foremost served the purposes of propaganda. All landmark events of proletariat rule were commemorated by the newsreel. In short clips, it portrayed the impoverished and disgraceful living conditions of the proletariat while demonstrating those of the bourgeoisie to be sumptuous and decadent. The Red Report-Film also continues to be the best testimony to the fact that the leaders of the proletarian dictatorship really made good on promises that had sounded too good to be true. Those proletarian children who had seemingly been condemned to ignorance, tuberculosis and lifelong misery were now seen picnicking in the very Park Club that once constituted an island of retreat for the luxuriating aristocracy. Proletarians who visited the movie theaters could happily ascertain that a healthier and more humane life awaited their children. (*Vörös Film*, 26 April 1919)[5]

The length of the of the editions varied between four and ten minutes and each of the compilations consisted of five to eight pieces of news. The represented topics were exclusively domestic, focusing mainly on the military actions of the national defence, the life of the Red Army soldiers, the official social welfare measures, the struggles and the successes of the proletariat, the features of the state leaders, commemorative events and other kind of celebrations. One of the highlighted peaks of the work was the documentation of the Day of Workers on the 1 May parade in Budapest, which was the biggest official mass celebration of the decade, and it also served as the symbolic reinforcement of the regime.[6] On this very exceptional day, according to the descriptions, ten to twelve cameramen documented the events at different spots of the city that was entirely decorated with red textiles, slogans and huge propaganda statues. The film ran in the cinemas of the capital city for six weeks, and was also distributed in the Russian territories (*Vörös Film*, 26 April 1919). As everybody else, the film industry workers also regarded themselves to be important enough to be put on display in a memorable way. They decided to march under a giant model of a red film reel, which was pulled by six white horses. Next to this impressive symbol of the new cinematic power, the industry workers walked, dressed in movie costumes, some of them carrying spears and wearing the mythological wings of Mercury, the god of messages and communication. Since their performance was also recorded by the cameras of the *Red Report*, the newsreel was used as a symbol for cinematic self-representation.[7] Being recorded by the news report produced both the indexical evidence of the political system in action and the proof of the presence of the participants, not only of the cinema workers. The documented events were highly topical as well as filled with a certain ritual meaning. As such, the films became precious pieces of the archives with historical interest for those various reasons.

The Red Reports in the archives

The issue of collaboration with the red forces was taken seriously by the incoming political regime led by Miklós Horthy, and following the partial shutdown of filmproduction, many professionals had to flee the country. The film industry remained suspicious in the eyes of the political leaders for a long time, and it was therefore no wonder that the officers of the Horthy-era decided not to destroy the *Red Reports*, but to confiscate them as criminal evidence. As police draughtsman Dániel Schreiber informs us in his article published in *Filmévkönyv* (*Film Year Book*) in 1922, the prestigious annals of Hungarian film, the authorities suppressed altogether about 80 films, 42 of them directly depicting the red dictatorship. Some of them were Russian productions and others about the Spartacist uprising in Berlin. In spring 1921, an inter-ministerial committee was established with the task of designing a prospective criminal film archive to be placed in the possession of the Crime Museum and displayed on certain occasions. The committee also helped the work of the investigating authorities that used the stills taken from the reels as factual evidence in the legal proceedings against the Lenin Boys and others arrested for their criminal activities during the red regime in 1919 (Schreiber 1922, 125). On 25 May 1921, the films were projected in the police headquarters in Budapest, and once again later in the presence of the governor at an exclusive screening in July (Schreiber 1922; Perjési 2001b).

Schreiber, who reported on the event, also stresses that the *Red Reports*, including the May Day recordings and the front reportages, should be considered the most valuable pieces of the collection. While evaluating the importance of the material, Schreiber goes further than just listing the practicalities. In his opinion, these films could be the base of a special collection of the Crime Museum that would represent the tools and cases of the crime of political agitation. Furthermore, he advises to supplement the film corpus with more related objects, such as books, press products and other means of propaganda. He suggests a practical classification system for the holdings in the 'agitation main group', categorised into agitation 'against social classes', 'against ethnicities', 'against religions', and the into the subgroup of 'the public praise of crimes' (Schreiber 1922, 125). Schreiber sees the medium of film as a double-edged sword in the hands of mankind, with a serious cultural role on the one hand, but the danger of destruction and crime on the other. According to the author, the Crime Museum is the best place to keep the films in question, because motion picture as such will take a growing part in the world of crime in the future.

After the process of investigation against the red enemy came to an end, the access to the dangerous content of the *Red Reports* became restricted. For moral and safety reasons, the prints were locked up in the vaults of the police archives for the rest of the interwar period.[8] In this regard, audio-visual archivist Zsuzsa Perjési brings attention to the fact that 'as there had been no entity in Hungary before World War II where films could have been collected and stored, therefore paradoxically it was the very decision aimed to hide the complete materials from the public that led to their preservation' (Perjési 2001a).

When the Communists came into power again, backed by the Soviet forces in the late 1940s, the interpretative frame of the 1919 footage radically changed. As Péter Apor puts it in his comprehensive work about the afterlife of the Hungarian Soviet Republic during the State Socialism, 'postwar Communists wanted to construct the history of 1919 as an instance of "usable past" and to establish the First Hungarian Soviet Republic as the

praefiguratio of their own regime' (Apor 2014, 27). Consequently, the events of the 133 days were often presented as an introductory chapter to the real victory in the late 1940s, but direct continuity between 1919 and the Rákosi-era was rarely drawn (Apor 2014, 39). In this situation, the collection of the *Red Report*s was transferred to the Hungarian Institute of Labour Movement as the historical memento of the heroic red pioneers. The Institute, established in November 1948, was supposed to research the new sub-discipline of Hungarian historiography with a focus on the memory of the labour movement (Erényi 1968, 104). The audio-visual content was only part of its archival collection; the institute focused more on the publication and contextualisation of the sources of the labour movement based on various text types, flyers, posters, or even memorabilia. Among other projects, the employees of the Institute published a comprehensive history of the Hungarian labour movement, ran their own periodical, prepared educational material and publications on occasions of anniversaries, and organised exhibitions on various topics.

It is not clear when the *Red Report* collection was transferred from the Institute of Labour Movement into the possession of the state-run audio-visual archive, but on 12 March 1956 a journalist of the newspaper *Szabad Nép* reported about how impressed he was by the screening of the newsreels during his visit to the Film Archive.[9]

In the 1960s, the red newsreels gained a cult status in the historical memory of the nation, that was sustained during the 1970s and 1980s. This can be explained with another change in the interpretation of the 1919 events that was introduced following the defeat of the Revolution in 1956 (Apor 2014, 165–198). To get affirmation, the freshly established Socialist regime led by János Kádár drew a parallel between the White Terror that followed the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 and the 'Counterrevolution' in 1956. In this framework, *Red Report*s became more and more important as documents of the historical period ended by the first counterrevolutionary attempts. An article published in the weekly paper *Magyar Ifjúság* on 22 March 1985 reveals not only another interesting chapter of the archival life of the films, but also speaks of an attempt to position the collection in this sense, as a serendipitous survivor of the chaotic days of 1956, preserved only by chance. This text is an anecdotal portrait written in the memory of the cinematographer Dezső Nagy, who was one of the cameramen of the *Red Report* newsreels working on the shots of the 1 May parade among other clips. According to one of the friends of the deceased Nagy, the filmmaker was always very proud of his works, and took responsibility for the survival of the material even in the turbulent days of the revolution in October 1956. Since Nagy felt that the state institution was not safe enough to guard such a precious collection in revolutionary times, he picked up some prints from the vaults in the area of the Film Factory in Budapest, then hid them with the *Red Report*s under cover in the cellar of his own home. When he handed back the reels after the revolution, he received some financial compensation and, of course, honourable recognition for taking care of the material. Following numerous turbulent decades, this could be how the surprisingly complete collection came into sole possession of the newly established Institute of Theatre and Film Studies, led by Ferenc Hont, in 1957.

Until 1989, the material has continued to be appropriated in various ways: re-edited, compiled, used in documentaries, TV programmes, or screened on different festive occasions. Just a few examples include the film series *50 éve történt/This Happened Fifty Years Ago* by László Bokor in 1969, the anniversary exhibition of the Labour Movement Museum in 1979, or the exhibition of the Museum of Military History on the national defence war

of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1979 (Rákóczy 1981, 169).[10] On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1919 events, the Hungarian Film Science Institute and Film Archive published a book under the title *A magyar film a Tanácsköztársaság idején* (*Hungarian Film during the Time of the Hungarian Soviet Republic*), edited by Erzsébet Garai, emphasising the importance of the newsreels. The book re-published a curated collection of documents, mainly articles of the *Vörös Film* from 1919, offering insights into the theoretical debates, goals and challenges of filmmaking during the red regime, complemented with the content description of the complete 20 editions of the *Red Report*s. The selection was introduced in an essay by the editor, in which she positioned the film industry of the Hungarian Soviet Republic as the first phase of Socialist film culture and a progressive part of the film heritage (Garai 1969, 5). Following the short description of the historical background, Garai concludes that the grandiose efforts and achievements, and the Socialist humanism documented by the articles are still inspirational, even after 50 years.

In 1987, Bruno de Marchi praised the relationship between the newsreels and history with the following words:

> The *Vörös film* [*Red Report*] not only witnesses but 'expresses' a concrete historical situation too. Expressing it, the *Vörös film* [*Red Report*] makes it free from the incoherence of its presentation and transforms it in an order of interhuman relations of great perspective: an order which includes every progressive movement of a people looking for greater freedom, a more effectual justice, and a real increase in the promotion of Man (212).

However, following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, with another political turn, the Communist past was rejected and the *Red Report* collection suddenly slipped out from the memory of Hungarian society for a period of time. When the first restoration became urgent due the shrunken, deteriorating physical state of the prints in the 1990s, in the absence of an authentic copy it was even impossible to work out the original order of the shots (Perjési 2001a). The main problem was that the prints were taken apart without documentation during the years of the intensive re-use, and the restorers also discovered the traces of several falsification attempts. Even with the possible mistakes in their mind, the workers of the Archive decided to follow the narrative compiled of the original newsreels in the 1950s. As Perjési argues,

> In the absence of authentic materials, we attempt to accept the surviving first compilation produced after WW2, even more so, because all film historical publications, articles and comprehensive historical books on film materials released since then follow this compilation and refer to news materials under such reference numbers. And numbering, as I have already mentioned, is arbitrary and historically unattested. We believe that another cut of the materials would simply result in a new, 2001 version that would not be any more authentic than the one already known (Perjési 2001a).

The argumentation of the restorer of the 1990s sheds light on the fact that the cases of re-use can easily affect the understanding of a collection within the archive. The *Red Report*s are not only interesting because they are preserved as early indexical motion picture footage representing a certain period of the national history, but their archival life also demonstrates how fast the status of the archival material changes. The identity of the very same footage varied from the witness of crimes, to the witness of the glorious past, always carrying the privileged status of being an authentic documentation of history. After the public release, the access to the collection was first restricted, then hidden for safety reasons, and later

widely opened for trusted professionals who could use the films for educational and propaganda purposes. The ownership also changed several times during the decades, and these shifts changed the interpretative frame every time. The prints were considered evidence of crime in the police archive, potential museum objects in the Crime Museum, historical documents in historical archive of the labour movement, vulnerable art works in the private collection of an author, and also part of the historical media collection in the possession of the state-run audio-visual archival institution. In most cases, as suppressed or highlighted entries of the collections, the films changed their status according to the ruling narratives of the historical past of the nation. Whenever a shift in the archival status is indicated, the socio-political environment of the country also goes through major alteration. Based on the archival history of the films, I argue that the unstable environment produces fluid archival identity in the case of the *Red Report*s, that not only helps to save the prints, but also affects the integrity of the collection. Through a thorough assessment of the fluid identity of the newsreels in question, the dynamics of the archive can be demonstrated.

An online revival

The imperative of the 100th anniversary of the revolutionary events in 1918–1919 has recently brought the *Red Report*s into focus again, and thus the employees of the national Archive decided to re-publish them, stressing the importance of these unique motion picture documents as historical sources. In this section of the article I will take a closer look on the online presentation curated by the national Film Archive. From my point of view, the virtual appearance is a further one from the many identities of the collection.

The *Red Reports*, along with other series from the newsreel collection of the Hungarian Film Archive, are published on the site *Filmhíradók Online* (*Newsreels Online*). The virtual archive was originally launched in 2009 with the aim of providing the society with free access to this massive audio-visual source of national history. As it is put in the mission statement of the editors, the project is meant to be not only a forum of recollection, but it also intended to fulfil an educational role through stimulating critical reflection on the working of the contemporary media:

> The records of *Filmhíradók Online* provide impressions of certain exciting historical ages, while the public receives information about the mechanism of publicity of that age as well. The media seen from historical perspective also gives the opportunity for grandsons and granddaughters living nowadays to examine the messages of contemporary media through these glasses.[11]

Although the comparison of obsolete and new media forms is phrased as one of the main purposes of the initiative, the nature of the similarities is not detailed, the deduction is rather left for the viewers.

During the first publication phase, the Hungarian newsreel editions from the years between 1931 and 1943 were made available, but the number of the digitised and uploaded items is increasing. At the moment, the collection contains newsreels produced in Hungary from the period between 1913 and 1963, including the *Red Report* series.[12] The watermarked films can be seen via a player built into the browser both in full length and separated into single news items. The dark, cinema-like landing page of the database resembles a timeline structure where the news items can be searched according to persons, places, topics as well

as texts (inserts and narrations). Content data is also provided regarding the missing or demolished material based on the descriptions survived in the censorial dossiers.

In this flagship project of the Archive, however, it is not only the amount of the films that is impressive, but also the great diversity of material. During the period of 1913 and 1963, total of eight different political regimes emerged and fell in Hungary, but newsreel production remained a key tool of communication that resulted in a relative continuity of the genre history. All these films belong to the wide pool of the newsreel category, but their quality, their aims and the scale of the applied propaganda vary widely. From this point of view it is striking that, despite the turbulent and often conflicting content of the collection, there is no description about the history of the newsreel production in the country. Under the menu title 'What is this?' the collection is positioned by the mission statement, but the opportunity to explain the meaning and origin of the provided material is omitted. While there is no official description apart from the metadata, the users can comment, share and tag the news items, which encourages the creation of subjective readings and personal narratives.

Whenever we are examining the collection of an archive, those dimensions of the reality that have not been archived or told must be also taken into consideration (Ketelaar 2002, 223). The reasons of incompleteness can range from the documents that were never born due to technical difficulties, to the organic loss caused by the vulnerability of the material, and to certain intentional forces. Even though the excluded information seems to be absent, this absence has an impact on the meaning of the existing records. In his canonical text about history and the archives, Michel Foucault speaks about the 'principle of exclusion' as a fundamental working method of the archives, pointing out that the way of applying the principle can be modified if a new discursive constellation is needed (Foucault 2002, 75). Explaining the problem of exclusion, he points to the things that are not said within the archival system of statements. With regard to the missing statements, the working of the archive must be considered dynamic, 'in an unformulated discourse, what it does not say, what it has not yet said, or what contradicts it at that moment; it is not a rich, difficult germination, it is a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions' (Foucault 2002, 134).

Jacques Derrida goes even further when he talks about the instinctual 'death drive' and uses the words 'marginalising, censoring, destroying' to describe the deconstructionist tendencies within the archive (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995, 44). He states that the archive 'produces memory, and produces forgetting at the same time' (54), and that the work of an archivist is not always about working for memory, but it is also a work of mourning, in other words, to keep the memory safe just in order to be able to forget it (54).

Even though the structural absences are not always direct results of intentional repression, the historical narratives produced using archival sources often mirror such intentions. In his seminal work on different forms of silences in writing history, Michel-Rolph Trouillot finds that these silences often appear at contradictory intersections between the stories told by different narrators. The past cannot be imagined without the present, moreover, it is written from the present, therefore, the pastness itself is nothing other than a position (Trouillot 1995, 15). Trouillot defines four distinctive moments when such silences can appear during the historical production: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources), the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives), the moment of fact retrieval

(the making of narratives), and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) (Trouillot 1995, 26). The moment of assembly means the archival work of selection (selection of producers, evidence, themes, procedures) and preservation, a complex process through which the sources of history writing become available. This work, again, cannot be understood as a passive way of collection, rather an active process of production that creates 'both the substantive and formal elements' of historical narration (Trouillot 1995, 52). Trouillot also draws our attention to the fact that most people acquire knowledge about history through various forms of media other than academic sources (20). Based on the example of the *Newsreels Online* multimedia website I argue that the lack of the description of the production context also shapes the identity of the archival material, furthermore, it can be considered as a form of silence. While the context of production was highlighted by such archival publications as the book edited by Erzsébet Garai during the time of the State Socialism, this aspect became less visible after 1989. From this angle, the missing information can be understood as a symptom of the unprocessed and still repressed past, and in this case, metadata becomes the foundation on which users can build their private narratives instead of editorial guidance.

A new chapter has been recently added to the history of the online publication, considering the fast development of the restoration and digitisation technologies. The archivists decided to return to the preservation of the newsreels of 1918–1919 on the centennial anniversary when the National Film Fund has provided new sources of finance.[13] The raising interest in the anniversaries of the early 20th century works as a catalyst here, just as we saw it in the cases of several international projects.[14] Within the scope of the new phase of work, the films were scanned in 2 K with a fresh revision of the possibly most complete version compiled from the prints and the available camera negatives (Barkóczi 2018). The series of *Az Est Film* and *Red Report* were re-published in the form of editorial video compilations with the curatorial and research work done by the archivists. The videos and the explanatory articles were featured on the website as well as on the YouTube channel of the Film Archive from week to week starting from 20 August 2018 onwards.[15]

The films are complemented with narration explaining the presented events based on the information learned from the digital archives of printed periodicals of 1918–1919. The narration mainly focuses on the historical data, but it also provides some explanation about the production context. As a result of the project, a new series of audio-visual productions was born based on the archival newsreel sources. This time, the films are presented rather in an essayistic, experimental form, far from the former database structure. The way of publication follows a straightforward linear flow that resembles the progress of the events a hundred years ago. This new form of presentation offers deeper contextualisation but loses the features of cross-references and network design of the database because of the characteristics of the streaming environment. While in the case of the website one decade ago the archivist-curators did not assume the role of narrator, they took over the position in the recent presentation form, ensuring the strongest possible control over the narrative. Their work has an impact on the formation of national memory, since they return to the traditional historian-archivist attitude within the project (Körmendy 2000). On one hand, the historian approach helps to point out the significance of the collection, which is amazingly rich in historical data, but on the other hand, it is equally important that the work is done under the cover of a creative layer, which results in autonomous films with curated content.

In his article, archivist Lajos Körmendy reflected on how the societal and historical changes formed the identity and outlook – the ethical, cultural and professional values – of Hungarian archivists starting from the late 19th century onwards. He points out that these unstable circumstances changed much faster than the community's ability to adapt, and the long-term exposure to disturbances resulted in ongoing crisis in official archives (Körmendy 2000, 42). Körmendy points out that after the fall of the Socialist regime in 1989, the course of democratisation made the work of the archival professionals more visible and called them into the political arena. Primarily, they had to react to the demands of the broader public for opening the vaults particularly around sensitive issues. As Körmendy notes, in the first democratic decade of the 1990s, the political shift set new challenges to the archival institutions, since many of the professional questions were turned into political issues and the archivists struggled with the stigma of belonging to the previous regime (Körmendy 2000, 51). The traces of this conflict can still be seen after the digital roll-out, to which, in my view, the different presentation strategies of the archives are different attempts of solution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would emphasise that the structure of the audio-visual archive is often fragile and politicised, especially if it works in a non-democratic environment. Although the institutional continuity of the Kádár-era helped the development of the technical environment, the evolution of the organisation was slow in the state-controlled ideological frame. Moreover, from researching the history of Hungarian audio-visual archival field and the *Red Report* collection it becomes clear that the use of the collection was always strongly affected by changes in the socio-political environment, and the key to its continuity could be in its adaptive nature. Due to the concept of the entirely state-controlled archival field under Socialism, only a few company archives and private family collections could grow. Under these circumstances, the counter-narratives based on parallel collections could only evolve to a limited extent, and every change in the socio-cultural environment had an impact on the main conglomerate and, through this, on the privileged master narrative as well. In the Hungarian case, the archival work is still struggling with its own conflicted past and the post-socialist heritage of the region, the independence of which can be facilitated by self-reflective research activities. Further examination of inherited values and the history of activisation of archival documents can reveal the broader context within which the collection has been born as well as the archive works as an institution.

Notes

1. See, for example, Houston (1994), Frick (2011), Jones (2012). One of the recent examples is the study by Bregt Lameris on the case of the Nederlands Filmmuseum between 1946 and 2000. In her monograph, Lameris acknowledges that all archival and museum practices should be considered socially constructed, but she primarily connects the work of the institution to the film historiographical discourse of the time (2017, 13). Lameris applies a mixed method of investigation while analysing the strategy of the collection management and presentation practice regarding the silent film heritage. She explains this choice with the 'difficult' nature of the collection where the number of the canonical titles is low, but there are many lesser known films (Lameris 2017, 12). In this interpretation, the colleagues of the archive must respond to serious film historiographical challenges connected to the idea of the

canon, but they had the chance to work in a stable and gradually developing environment from 1945 onwards.

2. XLVIII. decree of the Revolutionary Governing Council, 8 April 1919 (*Vörös Film*, April 12, 1919). The Hungarian sector is considered the first nationalised film industry of the world.
3. Mihály Kertész (1886–1962) left Hungary as early as spring 1919 because the Austrian Sascha Film company offered him a contract in Wien. Sándor Korda (1893–1956). who was the artistic director of the film industry as a member of the Directorium, fled the country after the fall of the regime, and he also started to work for Sascha Film (for more, see Balogh 1999, Magyar 2003).
4. The original prints were put in the picture archive of the propaganda section of the army. Based on the press reportage, we know that the film showed Trockij in Kiev, the burial of the heroes of the Bolshevik revolution in Kiev, the frontline in Bessarabia, war pictures in Ukraine, the anniversary of the formation of the Red Army (*Vörös Film*, 14 June and 21 June 1919).
5. I wish to thank to Dr. Eszter Polonyi for providing me with the translation. I would also like to thank Dr. Carolyn Birdsall for inspiring my interest in the topic and for her useful insights during the research.
6. The importance of the footage shot on the 1 May parade and the technical challenges faced by the filmmakers were emphasised in several articles published in the daily press of the time. The journals kept the readers informed about the preparation for the shooting (*Vörös film*, 12 April 1919, 19 April 1919) as well as about the distribution of the prints (*Képes Mozivilág*, 20 April 2019; *Népszava*, 10 May 1919). Next to the chief cinematographer Oszkár Damó (*Vörös film*, 19 April 1919), Mihály Kertész is mentioned as the chief director of the work (*Vörös film*, 12 April 1919). See also Vörös 2016; the description of the films Garai 1969, 265–269.
7. "Május elsejei felvonulás a főváros útjain." ("May-Day parade in the streets if the capital city") *Red Report*, 5/2. (May 1919) Accessed on May 4, 2019. https://filmhiradokonline.hu/watch.php?id=5249
8. Founded on the collection of the police archive, the Crime Museum officially opened in 1929 (*Budapesti Hírlap*, 15 February 1929). I have not found more references to the re-use of the *Red Report* films during the Horthy-era. Neither the anniversary editions of the newsreel series *Magyar Híradó*/*Hungarian Newreel* (silent, 1924–1931) or *Magyar Világhíradó*/*Hungarian World Newsreel* (sound, 1931–1944) appropriated their images, and I have not detected any other uses either.
9. For a detailed history of the State Film Archive in Hungary see Gyürey et al. 2009. The unstable identity of the archive is best illustrated by the frequent changes of its name in the last two decades. Magyar Filmintézet/Hungarian Film Institute that had been functioning under this name from 1984, reserved the 'national' title in 2000 and proceeded as Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchívum/Hungarian National Film Archive. In 2011, the collection was merged with Magyar Nemzeti Digitális Archívum és Filmintézet/Hungarian National Digital Archive and Film Institute, which was founded with the ambitious aim of linking multiple archives of the country in one centre with a special emphasis on digital development. The ambivalence of this concept is demonstrated by the fact that, although the institution was essentially a film archive, its official abbreviation (MaNDA) simply omitted the word 'film'. After six years, MaNDA was dissolved, and the name changed back to Hungarian National Film Archive on 1 January 2017. Since then, it has been one of the directorates of the National Film Fund, an organisation originally founded with the aim of supporting the production and distribution of Hungarian films. In 2018, the official name became Magyar Nemzeti Filmalap – Filmarchívum/Hungarian National Film Fund – Film Archive, which was changed to Nemzeti Filmintézet – Filmarchívum/National Film Institute – Film Archive – Hungary on 31 December 2019. Therefore, the same collection and the same professional organisation, working in the same place, wore at least five different names in the span of 20 years, each of them expressing different kind of authority on the valuable holdings.
10. Since the focus of this article is on the life of the *Red Report*s within the archives, I cannot provide a detailed examination of the artistic ways of re-use. In this regard, further research is needed.

11. Mission Statement. Accessed on May 30, 2019. https://filmhiradokonline.hu/en.php
12. For more about Hungarian newsreels, see Barkóczi 2017.
13. The principal investigator of the project was Galina Torma.
14. Just two of the many recent examples are the EFG1914 project focusing on World War I and the Victorian project of the BFI National Archive in 2019 that marked the 200th anniversary of Queen Victoria's birth.
15. "100-year-old newsreels." Accessed on May 20, 2019. http://filmarchiv.hu/en/news/100-year-old-newsreels. Some of the articles published on the page, along with the compilation videos, are co-written by the author of this article. "Filmhíradók 100 éve – Ezen a héten." ("Newsreels 100 year ago – This week.") Accessed on May 20, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVtv3NlLJrBymLyrqSDaiBw0qaBDBoKA9.

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